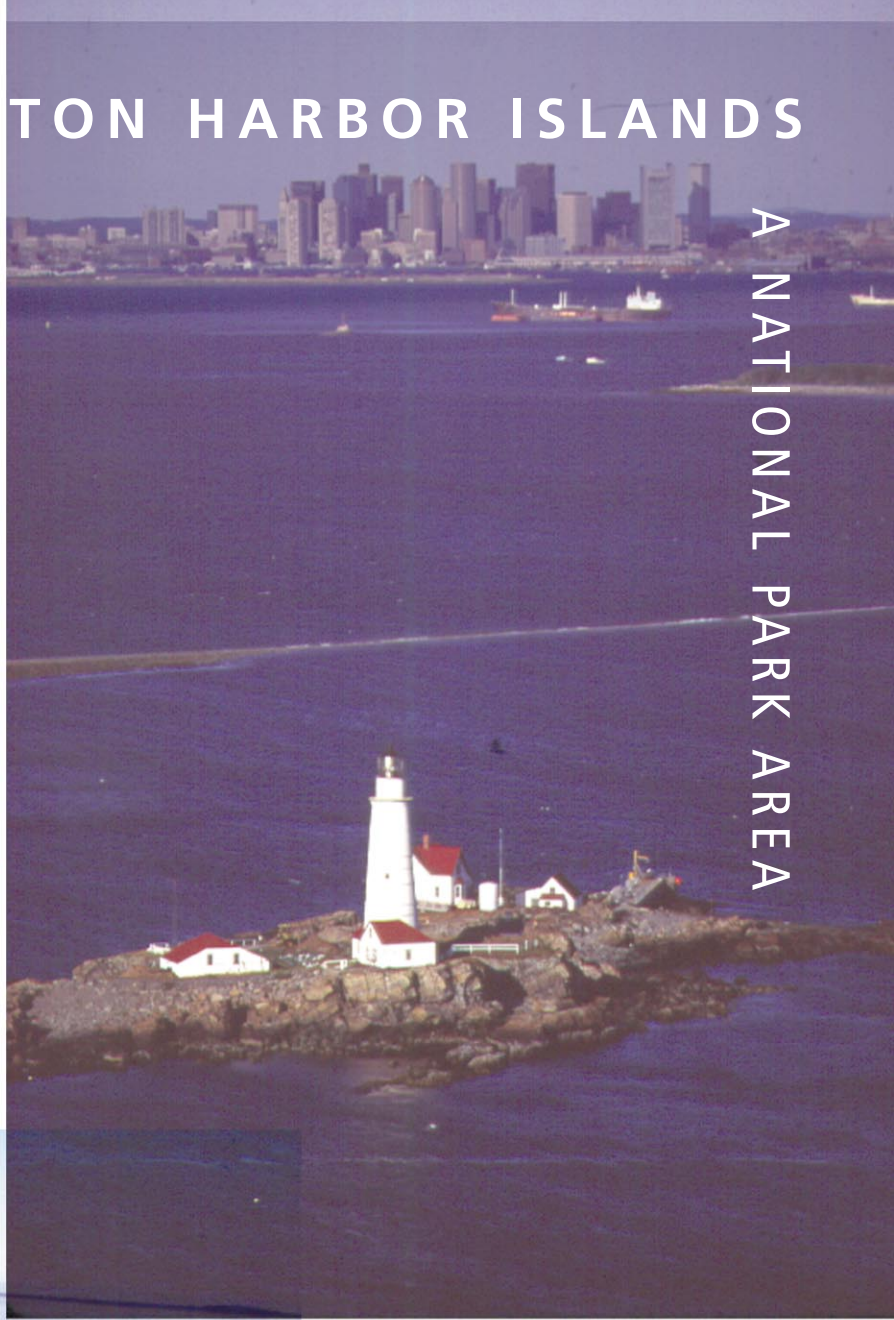


# BOSTON HARBOR ISLANDS

A NATIONAL PARK AREA



Draft General Management Plan and  
Draft Environmental Impact Statement

# BOSTON HARBOR ISLANDS

## A NATIONAL PARK AREA

Boston, Massachusetts  
April 2000

Prepared by  
Boston Support Office  
of the Northeast Region  
National Park Service  
for the Boston Harbor Islands Partnership



BOSTON  
HARBOR  
ISLANDS

# DRAFT GENERAL MANAGEMENT PLAN

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# E X E C U T I V E S U M M A R Y

**T**his document presents a draft of the first general management plan for this newly established national park area and a draft environmental impact statement for alternatives being considered for the Boston Harbor Islands. The draft general management plan and draft environmental impact statement are being offered by the Boston Harbor Islands Partnership for review and comment.

## **PARK RESOURCES**

The Boston Harbor Islands national park area contains some 30 islands (and former islands) lying within Boston Harbor. They range in size from less than 1 acre to 214 acres and together embrace 1,600 acres of land over an area of 50 square miles. The park incorporates the 16 islands of the Boston Harbor Islands State Park established in the 1970s.

Unlike islands typical of the New England coast, many of the Boston Harbor Islands are drumlins at their cores—glacier-formed, asymmetrical, elongate masses of till formed into smooth-sloped hills on the Boston Basin lowlands. With more than 200 mainland drumlins in eastern Massachusetts, these harbor islands are part of the only drumlin field in the United States that intersects a coastline. Several islands are not drumlins but bedrock outcrops.

Harbor water quality has improved over the past 10 years, as a wastewater treatment system for metropolitan Boston eliminates waste discharges into the harbor. Recreational activities such as swimming, fishing, and boating have increased as urbanites return to the harbor and the islands, and as national and international visitors discover the islands' cultural and natural history and opportunities for recreation close to a major tourist destination.

The islands, known to have been used or inhabited 8,000 years ago, had been cleared to

support agriculture and then various types of development. Today, the vegetation is predominantly grasses and sumac. Successional communities, including aspen, pine, birch, and white poplar, are found on portions of several islands. Boston Harbor and its islands provide shelter and food-rich habitats for fishes, invertebrates, marine mammals, and birds as well as nurseries for their young. Since Boston Harbor is part of the Gulf of Maine, its fauna is representative of the larger body.

Many of the Boston Harbor Islands contain buildings and structures related to uses such as coastal defense, agriculture, commercial fishing, year-round and summer habitation, resort life, industry, public health, immigration, and social welfare. More than 100 buildings and structures, including sea walls, forts, lighthouses, gun emplacements, concrete bunkers, wood-framed cottages, and brick military and institutional buildings, reflect the long history and changing character of the Boston Harbor Islands. The park contains three national historic landmarks: the Civil War-era Fort Warren on George's Island; Boston Light on Little Brewster Island, the oldest lighthouse site in the United States; and Long Wharf in downtown Boston, the longest continuously operating pier in the country. The Boston Harbor Islands contain numerous cultural landscapes, that when combined with the historic structures, archeological resources, and associated collections and archives, relate the history and character of a variety of cultural communities in the vicinity of Boston Harbor.

The Boston Harbor Islands contain evidence of American Indian use of such archeological significance that, to date, 21 islands have been designated within an archeological district listed on the National Register of Historic Places. The park's enabling legislation directs that park managers include programs to protect Indian burial grounds and sites associated with the King Philip's War.

A substantial museum collection related to the Boston Harbor Islands, comprising more than 6,000 items, is scattered among more than a dozen organizations, ranging from local, city, state and federal agencies and repositories, to private and nonprofit groups and institutions. The collection includes archeological, archival, historical, and natural history objects in a variety of print and nonprint formats.



## **ESTABLISHMENT OF THE PARK AND CURRENT MANAGEMENT**

Congress established the Boston Harbor Islands as a unit of the National Park System in 1996. Rather than having the National Park Service (NPS) own and manage the park, the law makes NPS a nonland-owning participant in the Boston Harbor Islands Partnership and directs the Partnership “to coordinate the activities of the Federal, State, and local authorities and the private sector in the development and implementation of” a general management plan. The enabling legislation established a 13-member body consisting of: National Park Service, U.S. Coast Guard, Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management, Metropolitan District Commission, Massachusetts Water Resources Authority, Massachusetts Port Authority, City of Boston, Boston Redevelopment Authority, Thompson Island Outward Bound Education Center, The Trustees of Reservations, Island Alliance, and Boston Harbor Islands Advisory Council.

The legislation also established the Boston Harbor Islands Advisory Council (currently 28 members), with two seats on the Partnership, whose purpose is to advise the Partnership on the development and implementation of the general management plan. A unique aspect of the park is the Island Alliance, a nonprofit organization, with a seat on the Partnership, charged in the legislation with generating private funding for the park.

The Boston Harbor Islands national park area is operated day to day by the agency property owners and managers who work through the Partnership to introduce consistency and coordination parkwide and to create parkwide programs. Several member agencies bring the experience of managing island properties for many years.

The National Park Service’s role is to help coordinate the Partnership and Advisory Council, to provide information and orientation to the public, to develop and operate programs, and to help assure that the park will be managed to NPS standards, as the law requires.

## **PURPOSE, SIGNIFICANCE, AND PARK GOALS**

The purpose of Boston Harbor Islands national park area is three-fold: to preserve and protect a drumlin island system within Boston Harbor, along with associated natural, cultural, and historic resources; to tell the islands’ individual stories and enhance public understanding and appreciation of the island system as

a whole; and to provide public access, where appropriate, to the islands and surrounding waters for the education, enjoyment, and scientific and scholarly research of this and future generations. The park’s significance derives from its array of resources: the islands and peninsulas containing archeological resources, historic sites, open space, wildlife habitats, and relatively undeveloped shoreline in an major urban area of the country; the only drumlin field in the United States that intersects a coast, formed by the glaciers some 15,000 years ago; opportunities for solitude and personal renewal, and land- and water-based education and recreation with potential to serve visitors from the region and around the nation.

This plan describes mission goals for the park—which capture the essence of the park’s vision and articulate ideals of the Boston Harbor Islands Partnership—and policies related to each goal. The goals and policies are treated by subject: (1) resource protection, (2) research and information, (3) visitor access, use, and enjoyment, (4) education and interpretation, (5) management and operations, and (6) external cooperation.

## **DEVELOPING THE ALTERNATIVES**

The thrust of the general management plan is the unification of the park into one entity managed by numerous agencies and organizations, and development of a set of goals, standards, and policies to be broadly endorsed by the park’s constituents. In keeping with the NPS Director’s Order for Planning, this plan presents policy-level guidelines, rather than site-specific and project-level plans, and is meant to guide the park for 15 to 20 years. This approach is especially useful because the primary need in this park is cohesion and unity within a large managing body of separate and independent entities. This plan thus contains the groundwork on which future actions will be built.

A National Park Service planning team has worked with the Partnership to write this draft general management plan, making frequent reports to the Partnership and the Advisory Council, and consulting with the general public, various advocacy and interest groups, and the agencies and organizations that own and manage property in the park. Resource data on the island system has been gathered and analyzed on an ongoing basis. The broad concepts for management were developed, and a range of visitor experiences and resource conditions were identified and described in

six management areas (management zones), ranging from the conditions at mainland ferry departure points, to resource conditions and visitor experiences on remote, largely natural, islands.

Two alternative concepts (A and B) were developed and described. After discussion with Partnership and the Advisory Council members, the Planning Committee concluded that a third alternative concept was needed, giving strong emphasis to preservation of resources, while identifying certain islands for more intensive use. A strong consensus then developed around the concept of Alternative C, which received the unanimous endorsement of the Partnership and the Advisory Council as the preferred alternative for the draft general management plan. All members of the Partnership including the Advisory Council have reviewed early drafts of this Draft General Management Plan/Draft EIS. The no-action alternative is the continuation of current management with no additional funding from the NPS, and the continuation of separate and sometimes divergent policies applied to islands by each manager. Alternative A emphasizes preserving resources whereas Alternative B emphasizes providing activities for the visitor. Alternative C focuses on the large, previously developed islands for a high level of visitor activity with the protection of resources, and leaves the more remote islands in a “natural” management area with few visitor amenities.

### ATTRIBUTES COMMON TO ACTION ALTERNATIVES

Many attributes are common to Alternatives A, B, and C. Of the 30 some areas considered in this plan, 16 would be expected to undergo little or no change in infrastructure. All three alternatives list the same potential mainland gateways—passenger ferry departure points with information and orientation for the park visitor. As the park evolves, as the visitation grows, and as the water transportation system is able to sustain expanded service, additional gateways would be designated by the Partnership. All three alternatives designate Spectacle and George’s as “hub” islands for passenger ferry and visitor services.

Areas of special uses also are the same in all three alternatives. The special use designation recognizes the distinctive areas of the park that will not undergo change through this general management plan. These areas are found on Deer and Nut islands, which have wastewater treatment facilities; on Long and Moon islands, which have social service and public safety

facilities; and on Thompson Island, which has an educational campus.

Natural resources would be monitored to avert over-use, with emphasis on critical or sensitive resources; cultural resources would be preserved according to the Secretary of the Interior’s standards for treatment of historic properties. Carrying capacity ranges would be established for each management area using a scientific analysis of resource impacts together with visitor experiences. Under all action alternatives, the Partnership would encourage a range of research needed as the scientific basis for resource management.

For visitors, a park identity system would be developed and a system of mainland information kiosks, wayside exhibits, and other interpretive media would orient passengers before they embark on a ferry. There would be an increase in number of visitors overall, although the distribution of visitors would not be even throughout: some islands would have few or no visitors while other islands would have many. The water transportation system is designed to provide visitors with access to the park; it would be operated by private boat operators under contract to the Partnership or its member agencies. The system would be monitored and evaluated periodically and adjusted as needed.

Islands would continue to be managed by existing managers with overall policy established by the Boston Harbor Islands Partnership. Each island open to the public would have resource protection, interpretive, maintenance, and administrative staff necessary to maintain parkwide standards. Coordination among island managers would be done by the Partnership, and staff support for the Partnership and the Advisory Council would be provided primarily by the NPS with support by Partner agency personnel as available.

Any infrastructure development undertaken would support park goals. All new infrastructure would be sustainable, make use of renewable resources, and would be guided by a “green” philosophy. Potential changes include: handicapped-accessible piers, visitor contact stations and visitor centers, utilities in certain areas, an American Indian cultural center, lodgings and campsites, administrative facilities, maintenance facilities, staff housing, adaptive reuse of historic structures, removal of some deteriorated structures, rehabilitation of some landscapes, boat moorings, and rental facilities for water sports. Estimated capital costs would range from \$61 million to \$88 million, with a

special initiative for Peddock’s Island undertaken in collaboration with the private sector estimated at an additional \$16 million to \$57 million. “Gateways” on the mainland could range from \$4 million to \$20 million. Total annual cost of operations would be approximately \$8 million under the action alternatives. Differences would be found in the differing emphasis placed on resource protection, visitor activities, and programs. Funds for park operations would come from all partners, except the Advisory Council, and from private sector funds raised by the Island Alliance. Federal funding would be provided in the ratio of one-to-three, federal-to-nonfederal dollars. The National Park Service and the other public entities would be expected to fund large infrastructure projects throughout the system, again in the ratio of one-to-three, federal-to-nonfederal dollars. In all alternatives, revenue could be expected from park-related revenues, use fees, and income from commercial operations such as rentals, boat excursions, food sales, and events such as concerts.

### **THE PREFERRED ALTERNATIVE**

Alternative C, the preferred alternative, gives emphasis to the preservation of island resources, while concentrating activities for visitors in designated areas. Although potentially, five “hub” islands could be developed, the initial and primary hub islands would be George’s, Spectacle, and Peddock’s; secondary hubs could be established at Long and Deer if ferry service demand warranted it. In general, “hub” facilities would be concentrated close to the pier and would include visitor contact stations, restaurants or food concessions, boat rentals, and small venues for events like concerts, historical pageants, and educational presentations. Facilities would be improved to emphasize resource protection throughout the park and the accommodation of visitors in designated areas of the park.

In the preferred alternative, park managers are challenged to provide visitors with creative, educational programs that provide meaning and bring the resources alive. The visitor has a menu of choices about where to go for a range of experiences, from immersion in cultural or natural history to recreational activities with resources as the backdrop. Visitors experience the park in its multifaceted possibilities, which focus attention and programs on cultural and natural history of the islands. Active management would conserve or preserve resources. Efforts would be made to engage volunteers in stewardship of resources.

### **POTENTIAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS**

The potential impacts of no federal action and the three alternative actions, A, B, and C, were evaluated, and a summary of impacts is included in the draft environmental impact statement for air resources, coastal processes, water quality, soils, upland vegetation, terrestrial wildlife, wetland and aquatic vegetation, wetland and aquatic marine wildlife, protected species, special communities or habitats, cultural landscapes, archeological and ethnographic resources, historic buildings and structures, museum collections, and socioeconomic factors.

In general, Alternatives A and C would have fewer negative impacts and more positive impacts on natural resources than Alternative B. Negative impacts on natural resources from an increase in visitors would be mitigated. The condition of cultural resources would be improved in all alternatives over no action, with Alternative B providing the fewest positive impacts. Based on the NPS “money generation model,” all alternatives would have positive impacts; Alternative B would provide the most revenue, taxes, and jobs for the region. The alternatives improve the overall condition of natural and cultural resources and provide positive socioeconomic impacts.

### **NEXT STEPS**

The draft general management plan and draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) will be available for public review for 60 days. Following public review, a proposed plan will be prepared by the Partnership, and the final draft GMP and final EIS will be published. Following a 30-day period, the plan will be submitted to the Governor of Massachusetts. Then a record of decision will be prepared by the National Park Service Northeast Regional Director for the Secretary of the Interior.

During review periods the National Park Service will accept written and oral comments. The Partnership will carefully review all comments and incorporate them, as appropriate, in the final plan and final impact statement. The National Park Service may make public any written comments it receives on the plan, including the names and home addresses of respondents; these comments may be inspected during regular business hours. Individual respondents may request that NPS withhold their home address from the planning record, which will be honored to the extent allowable by law. There also may be circumstances in which NPS would withhold from the

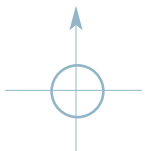
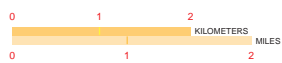


planning record a respondent's identity, as allowable by law. If anyone wishes to have his or her name and/or address withheld, he or she must state this prominently at the beginning of the comment. The National Park Service does not consider anonymous comments. For all submissions from organizations or businesses, and from individuals identifying themselves as representatives or officials of organizations or businesses, the National Park Service will make the submissions available for public inspection in their entirety. A copy of the draft general management plan and a response form will be posted on the World Wide Web at [nps.gov/BOHA/admin](http://nps.gov/BOHA/admin).

Comments should be submitted to:  
George Price, Project Manager  
Boston Harbor Islands National Park Area  
408 Atlantic Avenue, Suite 228  
Boston, Massachusetts 02110

For further information, please contact the project manager at (617) 223-8666.

# BOSTON HARBOR ISLANDS



# BOSTON HARBOR ISLANDS

## Legend



Park Islands



Mass Transit Stop